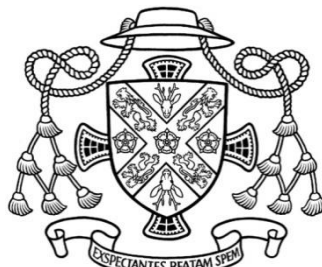


Pastoral Letter
Of
Terence Patrick Draine



Bishop of Middlesbrough

World Day of Prayer for Vocations 2023

Dear Sisters and Brothers,

On the day of Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit had encouraged and emboldened the Apostles, Peter began to preach. So inspiring were his words given to him by the Spirit that the people listening knew that they were hearing a new message and being summoned to a new calling. In delight and somewhat confusion, they asked the obvious question: “What must we do, brothers?” ‘You must repent,’ Peter answered, ‘and every one of you must be baptised in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.’ That call to repentance and the invitation to enter into a new relationship with God through Jesus are the very same vocation, calling, invitation that have been given to us. This is our first and fundamental calling as Christians, to respond, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, to the invitation to become children of God, and, by the power of Christ’s Cross and Resurrection, to reject everything that prevents us from doing so.

Jesus reminds us in the Gospel that “When the shepherd has brought out his flock, he goes ahead of them, and the sheep follow because they know his voice.” Each one of us knows and can joyfully proclaim with the psalmist that “The Lord is my shepherd: there is nothing I shall want. He guides me along the right path; he is true to his name. If I should walk in the valley of darkness no evil would I fear. You are there with your crook and your staff; with these you give me comfort.” This is why we listen to the Good Shepherd and learn to follow him as he leads us through the ups and downs of everyday life.

If you had not worked it out already, today is Good Shepherd Sunday. It is also the World Day of Prayer for Vocations. The presumption is that each one of us has a vocation. I have just mentioned the first and fundamental vocation that every single one of us has as Christians. That calling came to us at our baptism. However, growing from that fundamental calling there are many more vocations. All of these callings are ordered to the building up of the Body of Christ. A vocation is not someone’s personal property. Each of us is called for the glory of God and the good of others.

Some of these vocations are very public and, if you like, a little bit obvious. For example, Marriage, Holy Orders, Consecrated Life within a community or in the world, Apostolic Life, again within a

community or in the world. Then there are very individual callings, for example to live out the Christian life within the context of work, be it ordinary work or work with a specific charitable aim. I think what I am trying to say is that every single one of us has a calling or callings which flow from our being first called to life in Christ.

In his message for the World Day of Prayer for Vocations last year, Pope Francis wrote: “We are called to be guardians of one another, to strengthen the bonds of harmony and sharing, and to heal the wounds of creation lest its beauty be destroyed. In a word, we are called to become a single family in the marvellous common home of creation, in the reconciled diversity of its elements. In this broad sense, not only individuals have a ‘vocation,’ but people, communities and groups of various kinds as well.”

All these callings matter. Whoever we are, wherever we find ourselves, by responding to God’s call, we give glory to God, we build up the Body of Christ, and we enrich the Church and the world with our gifts which flow from these vocations. Each of us is called by God for one another. If we decline our vocation, not only are we diminished personally, but all of us are the poorer.

I leave the last words to Pope Francis: “When we speak of ‘vocation’ then, it is not just about choosing this or that way of life, devoting one’s life to a certain ministry, or being attracted by the charism of a religious family, movement, or ecclesial community. It is about making God’s dream come true, the great vision of fraternity that Jesus cherished when he prayed to the Father “that they may all be one” (*Jn 17:21*). Each vocation in the Church, and in a broader sense in society, contributes to a common objective: to celebrate among men and women that harmony of manifold gifts that can only be brought about by the Holy Spirit. Priests, consecrated men, and women, lay faithful: let us journey and work together in bearing witness to the truth that one great human family united in love is no utopian vision, but the very purpose for which God created us.”

In blessed hope,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Lawrence Patrick".

Bishop of Middlesbrough

To be read and made available on the Weekend of 29/30 April in all churches and chapels of the Diocese.